General Public Comments from Capacity Questionnaire (March through April) 2000

The most serious problems facing Vermont's public water systems in the following areas are:

Technical:

3/14- Infrastructure should be on a yearly planning for capitalization, updating after a certain date or when problems arise.

3/20- There are too few engineers in the state to handle legal requirements.

3/23- NERWA and the Water Supply Division have been very helpful.

3/24- The existing source for new water systems need to be fully investigated for quality and quantity before expending state funds.

3/27- Fund program to support better inventions for water systems.

4/5- Monitor the quality and quantity of water systems to sustained the capacity need for large building programs.

4/6- Old infrastructure needing replacement. More frequent and local training for operators.

Financial:

3/14- Water rates planning should be adjusted accordingly to the age of water system.

3/20- On small jobs most of the technical work could be handled outside the current permit system. The current engineering and permit cost is often more than the cost of installing equipment or drilling wells.

3/22- The very small water systems have great difficulty in financing the required upgrades, testing to meet state standards. State should help fund those requirements.

3/23- The Vermont Health lab should be funded so that all the required tests could be done there.

3/27- The State needs to fund small water systems more due to new regulations. Buying bottle water is very expensive.

4/3- Most don't have the financial capacity to handle major setbacks in construction and source adequacy(aquifer usage) in booming ski area which leads to catastrophic planning.

4/4- Increased regulation is causing financial burden.

4/5- Small systems should be subsidized by the state.

4/10- Higher user fees versus cost to cover upgrades to water systems.

***Managerial*:**

3/14- A working superintendent has to be the manager of the water system and stay ahead of all the rules changes and requirements.

3/20- Inspections of all water system should develop deficiencies and owners of the systems should solve their problems without state supervision.

3/22- There should be more reminders for testing/requirements could be helpful due to the fact that operators wear several hats for different positions.

3/24- Operation and staffing needs commitment as well as ability and the depth to provide coverage at all times. Conservation of water need to become a top priority state/country wide.

3/27- Water systems existing staff should consider using better work ethics and personal responsibility is often lacking in the current labor force.

4/4- Water Supply Division is not user friendly. It's almost impossible to speak to someone live always. I get voice mail which gives the impression that State employees take too many vacations/breaks.

4/5- Small water systems with 14 communities and 26 people shouldn't be subject to the same testing and regulations as larger systems.

4/10- Support adequate staffing for water systems review.

2) Suggested solutions or programs to help solve above problems:

3/14- Federal and State governments should bear more of the financial burden of the necessary expensive upgrades to small water system in compliance of the Federal Drinking Water Act.

3/20- Eliminate engineering requirements on simple systems. Owners should seek engineering advise while State should only monitor the water quality.

3/22- State should provide the financial support for upgrades, testing for bonafide projects as the state does with regional school systems.

3/24- Water Supply Division needs to work closer with fire districts in all areas. (Total projects and beyond).

1) Verify the proposed supply quality, quantity and projected sustain ability.

2) Insist that all components of a water system meets a reasonable life expectancy.

3) Audit the project guidelines closely as to worked completeness.

3/27- Water systems should promote conservation of water to prevent waste.

4/4- State of Vermont needs to recognize that many water systems are serving a poverty level or below population and be more tolerant with interpretation of regulations and requirements.

4/5- There need to be a level of determinations on how state funds are distributed. Funding should be available to system that what to comply but don't have the financial ability.

4/10- Continue with state funded grant programs for infrastructure improvements for small water systems.

4/5 - USDA Rural Development - T. Weiss Comments -

Capacity of Small Water Systems:

Methods or criteria that could be used to prioritize systems by capacity.

Technical:

- A contract operator working part time but full time on several water systems is a very effect way of utilization job management for the percent of time devoted to running water system.
- Deficiencies noted on Water Supply Division surveys would receive scores based on a combination of factors:

1) the seriousness of the deficiency

2) actions taken to correct the deficiency (i.e. none vs. initiated a plan)

3) ability of the users to pay for the corrective action (users' income vs correction cost)

Financial:

- Ratio of user' income(possibly median, possibly lowest) to annual system expenses. A lower number indicates less capacity.
- Ratio of system's tax base to annual system expenses. A lower number means less capacity.

***Managerial*:**

- Ratio of adult users to number of members of the governing body. Lower number indicates less long term capacity.
- Knowledge of SDWA must meet technical requirements; issuing consumer confidence reports; perform required testing for water quality; issuing proper notice of violation.
- Provide the availability, accuracy, currency of financial information; presence of a master plan; status of source water protection plan.

- Number of different water systems in a town would indicate less capacity (an ability or unwillingness to co-operate or consolidate).

Factors that encourage or impair capacity development

<u>Encourage</u>

- NeRWA circuit riders help overcome a lack of capacity in certain areas, mostly technical.
- RCAP circuit riders help to overcome a lack of financial or managerial capacity.
- Requirements for certification of operators.
- Some of rural development's requirements ans assistance for funding (e.g., working with applicants during the application stage, audits, security inspections, fidelity bonds)

<u>Impair</u>

- Small systems and municipalities that are not willing to work together.
- Policies that encourage multiple systems in a town (e.g., funding agencies that consider number and size of systems to be a local, political issue)

Assistance to help increase capacity

Capacity can be increased by a number of factors. The focus of initial efforts to increase capacity will be determined by the areas of low capacity found by the ranking system.

Training will be appropriate in some cases where low capacity results from a lack of knowledge. The training might be by group or individually. The circuit riders are one resource for providing this training.

Consolidation might be appropriate in some cases of very small systems. Corrective action would be working with clusters of small systems and municipalities to explore the advantages of consolidation. Consolidation could be physical consolidation or it might involve only managerial or financial aspects. Consider a better funding package for consolidation if that will increase capacity.